

13 March 2009

BUSINESS & LABOR

EXHIBIT NO. 5
DATE 3-13-09
BILL NO. HB 390

Hello! Thank you Chairman Balyeat and members of the committee.

My name is Jeanine Ockey-Webb and I live in Helena with my husband and three sons. My second son, Max, was born in Arizona in a certified, licensed, freestanding birth center run by midwives, of the very type this bill addresses. I urge you to vote YES on House Bill 390.

My first son was born in a hospital where I was treated like a number, developed iatrogenic complications and generally had an unsafe and unpleasant birth experience. We waited four years to conceive again, during which time I spent hundreds of hours researching birth options in an attempt to improve upon my hospital birth experience.

We chose a freestanding birth center for Max's birth. At the birth center, I received excellent, professional care, unmatched by either of the two hospitals in which my other children were born. From the time I entered the birth center in labor until the time I left with my healthy baby, my nurse was assigned to me and my baby and no one else. As the time for delivery drew near, I had two professional midwives with me continuously. The birth center was within five miles of a hospital, should emergency transport have been necessary.

During my pregnancy with Max, my husband fought – and BEAT – cancer. We had excellent insurance coverage, but having reached our out of pocket maximum by February of that year, we were quite cash-strapped. **Because the birth center was licensed and accredited, our insurance company, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, covered my expenses there. The center was also heavily used by Medicaid patients. Without licensure, this coverage would not have been available and I, along with those Medicaid patients, would not have been able to use this facility. Ironically, this safe and less expensive option would have been available only to those wealthy enough to pay fully out-of-pocket.**

By the time my third son was born we were living in Billings, Montana, my husband an employee of the state of Montana. We explored the birth center option but our state-employee health plan wouldn't pay for it so we chose a more expensive and less desirable hospital birth. It was a disappointment after the excellent, safe care I had received at a freestanding birth center, and Montana state government paid a ridiculous premium for it.

See, this bill is not about greedy midwives or endangering babies, though the lobbyists for wealthy obstetricians would have you believe that. It is, after all, **not** in the financial interests of doctors and hospitals to allow any competition. The *truth* is that licensed birth centers provide a safe and much less expensive alternative to their virtual monopoly.

This bill is about providing safe and inexpensive options to some of the most vulnerable in our society, childbearing women and their infants. Many conservative Montana families like mine, who desire children but live on one modest income, are feeling the economic crunch. Midwives do not make a lot of money, and that will not change in any significant way as a result of this bill's passage, despite what industry lobbyists will claim. **What will change is that in a time of tightening budgets, both in the Montana legislature and in individual homes like mine, Montana women from a wider socioeconomic range will have safe choices in their medical care. That makes this bill a no-brainer. Increase access to healthcare at a decreased cost. Please vote yes on House Bill 390. Thank you.**

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